

THE
Character of a SOUL
Espoused to CHRIST.

N O M A N T 172
S E R M O N

PREACHED

Upon a Thanksgiving Day after the
Sacrament of the LORD's SUPPER,
in the Tolbooth Church of Edinburgh,
March 6th, 1732.

By Mr. EBENEZER ERSKINE,
One of the Ministers of STIRLING.

From S O N G viii. 5.
*Who is this that cometh up from the Wilder-
ness leaning upon her Beloved.*

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S E R M O N

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SONG viii. 5.

Who is this that cometh up from the Wilderness leaning upon her Beloved.

YOU find in the first Verse of this Chapter, that notwithstanding of the great and high Attainments the Church had met with, yet she expresses her earnest Desires after further Degrees of Intimacy and Fellowship with her blessed LORD. *O that thou wert as my Brother, that sucked the Breasts of my Mother, &c.* Our gracious LORD cannot suffer the poor Soul, who has Longings after Him, always to continue the same; for you see the Spouse's Desire: *His left Hand should be under my Head, and his right Hand should embrace me.* While she gave a Charge to her Fellow-believers from marring that Communion she had with her LORD, she says, *I charge you, O ye Daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up, nor awake my Love, till he please.*

Now, the Daughters of Jerusalem, being supposed the Witnesses of her Fellowship
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The Character of a Soul Espoused to Christ. 3

with her Lord, they are brought to admiration of that Fellowship they saw betwixt Christ and his Spouse: Saying, *Who is this that cometh up from the the Wilderness leaning upon her Beloved.* In which Words, *First*, Notice here the present Place of Residence the Spouse of Christ hath, it is a Wilderness, a weary Land, where there is but little Comfort, Pleasure or Satisfaction to be had. *Secondly*, Notice the Way she is taking in the Wilderness; she is not sitting still, nor going down, but coming up from the Wilderness; she has her Eyes toward her own Country, which has bred a Dissatisfaction in her bosom with the husks that the swine do eat. *Thirdly*, Notice the posture she is coming in *from the Wilderness*; she is in a leaning posture; *she is leaning upon her Beloved*: it means her strengthening herself in him, and strengthening her Faith upon him; it supposes her being sensible of her weakness in herself, and that her strength for her journey was in her Husband. *Fourthly*, Notice her Stay on which she leaned, *she leaned on her Beloved*, which is Christ, whose Love elevated all the powers and faculties of her soul. O, says GOD the Father, *He is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*: and, says the Soul that is betrothed to him, he is the Darling of my heart and soul. *Fifthly*, Notice here the influence this has upon the Daughters of *Jerusalem*: and it is here mentioned, *Who is this that cometh up from the Wilderness, &c.*

They are struck with amazement to see such Love between Parties: That *the high and lofty One* should maintain fellowship with poor lost and lothsome Mankind. It is a great pleasure to a real Believer to see another thriving and prospering in the Lord's way, though they themselves should be darkened in the view of the world.

DOCTRINE. Namely, *It is the certain Duty and commendable Practice of Souls truly espoused to the Lord Jesus Christ, to come up from the Wilderness of this World, towards the promised Land above, Leaning upon their Beloved.*

And here, *First*, I shall endeavour to give some of the Characters of those who are truly espoused to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, To speak concerning this World as a Wilderness.

Thirdly, To speak to the Church's Way she is taking in the Wilderness.

Fourthly, To speak to her Posture she was in. And,

Fifthly, Enquire into the Reasons of this Doctrine.

Lastly, To apply the whole.

First, To give some Characters then of a Soul truly espoused to the Lord Jesus Christ.

1st, The Believer, as espoused unto Christ, is one that is ay breathing after more intimaey
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with Christ, as in the first Verse of this Chapter where the Text is: *O! that thou wert as my Brother, that sucked the Breasts of my Mother.* O! might she say, that I saw that happy day, that God should appear in my flesh, I would call him my Brother indeed; if I saw him manifested in the flesh, I would go through the Vail of his Flesh. This is her earnest Desire of greater Nearness with God than ever she has had: *When shall I come and appear before God.*

2dly, The Soul that is espoused to Christ, is one that will own him, and adore him, and worship him, and honour him before all the world, and will not be ashamed. Believers kiss him with a kiss of subjection and obedience, and they are not ashamed before all the World, for they that disown Christ in this World, he will disown them at another day.

3dly, Another part of the Soul's Character, that is espoused to Christ, you have in the 3d verse: they are concerned for Christ's public Cause in the World, and especially that he may come to Ordinances, that themselves and others may get good by him. The Church is little worth when Christ is not there. Therefore it concerns every one to be earnest that he would come there. He is in a great measure departed and withdrawn from among us; therefore it will be the concern of those that are espoused to him, to have him brought back again.

4thly, The Soul espoused unto Christ, is concerned to be further instructed by Christ in the Principles of Christianity. In the 6th verse, she wants to be further instructed by Him; for when he comes in a way of Grace to a Believer, there the Oracles of Heaven are opened.

Another Part of their Character we have in the last Part of the 2d verse of this Chapter: When Christ feasts his friends, then they reply and will give him the best they have: *I will cause thee to drink of the spiced Wine, of the Foice of my Pomegranate.*

5thly, A Soul espoused to Christ can never rest till it win into the very Arms and Bosom of a Redeemer. In the 6th verse O! might she say, let my Soul, my Life, my All redound in him; and let my Heart and Love be in his Bosom. As it is the Desire of a Soul espoused to Christ, to have his Love between their Breasts; so they can never rest till they be as it were in his Bosom, and in his Breast. If you have met with any thing of the Lord at this Occasion, you will certainly take care of every thing that will marr your Love between Christ and you.

6thly, The Soul that is espoused to the Lord Jesus Christ, is one that has turned her back upon this World, and is coming up from the Wilderness leaning upon her Beloved.

So much for the Characters of those Souls truly espoused to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now

Now to speak to the *Second* Thing, which is the Place of her Residence, it is a *Wilderness*.

1. A Wilderness is a solitary place. What is this World to the people of God, especially when God withdraws from them; it is certainly a solitary place; there is a kind of a Wilderness in the Spirit. O! says the Spouse, *that I knew where I could find him.*

2. A Wilderness is a foggie and misty place; many fogs and mists arise from the Wilderness, and darken the sky, whereby a traveller is in danger of being perished in going out of his way: so is this World to the people of GOD, where the Devil reigns and roars. Hell seems to have opened its mouth this day, and would, if it were possible, darken the Sun of Righteousness.

3. A Wilderness is a dry and thirsty Place. David complains, that *he was in a dry and thirsty land where no water was*: what is in this World to a Believer? Nothing it can afford. Truly they are fed in the Wilderness; but no thanks to the Wilderness for that, for they have no food from it, but from above.

4. A Wilderness is a place of danger; thieves and robbers, Lions and Leopards, and many wild creatures haunt the Wilderness, whereby a Traveller is not only in hazard of his goods, but in hazard of his life; so is this World to a Believer, where the Devil goes about as a roaring Lion, seeking whom he may devour. But a Believer shall never fall totally

in the enemy's hands. Yet you that have been at the Communion Table had need to take care of yourselves, when you are to go to the Wilderness again. You had need to take care, for Satan is waiting upon you, *to sift you, and try you.*

5. A Wilderness is an unsettled place; sometimes the traveller is on the top of the mountains, sometimes in the plain; so that his journey is unsettled, and he knows not well what it may be. So is it with the Believer; he is sometimes upon the mountain of fellowship and communion with GOD, and sometimes in the depths of desertion.

3. The Wilderness is a thorny place. Men travelling through the Wilderness have rough and thorny places to go through: So the Believer in this World must expect *to go thro' many tribulations, till he win to the Kingdom of Heaven.* So much for this Head.

The *Third* general Head proposed, was to speak unto the Course the Spouse is taking, while in the Wilderness: *she is coming up from it.* Notice these few Particulars.

1st, It implies, That she had turned her back upon sin: (I say, upon the ways of sin:) there are crooked ways in the Wilderness, whereby a traveller is in danger of finding the right way, therefore the generality of the World walk in ways of sight.

2^{dly}, It implies that Believers are but strangers in the Wilderness, and they are seeking
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for a better country than they can have on this side of time. Heb. xi. 13, 14. where the faithful Cloud of Witnesses *having all died in Faith, not receiving the Promises, but seeing them afar off, they confessed that they were but Pilgrims and Strangers on the Earth, for they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a Country.*

3dly, It implies a dissatisfaction with their present state in the wilderness. These Witnesses see there is nothing in this World can be satisfying or encouraging to them; and therefore they seek a better, Heb. xi. 10. *But now they desire a better Country, that is an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a City.*

4thly, It implies a View and Prospect of a Rest beyond the Wilderness. Believers have a View of a Land afar off, and they are pressing forward towards it.

5thly, It implies a Motion, and a Progress in her Motion; she is in her Way, *she goes from strength to strength, making progress therein.*

6thly, It implies that Righteousness and true Godliness is an up-the-hill way, and Believers in the Wilderness have many hills and mountains in their way heaven-ward.

1. There is a Hill of remaining Ignorance in the Wilderness; the Believer has but some Discoveries of God in the World, *and sees but as it were in a Glass.*

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2. The Believer meets with a Hill of remaining Unbelief, and he has many wrestlings with this Hill of Unbelief, to win over it; see the Psalmist his case, wrestling with God, who was made to cry out, *Will the Lord cast off for ever, and will he be favourable no more?* Psal. lxxvii. 7.

3. Some times there is a high Hill of Sin and Guilt in the Believer's passage through the Wilderness, and he is afraid it tumble over upon him: *Mine Iniquities have taken hold of me*, says the Psalmist.

4. There is a Hill of Divine Hidings the Believers sometimes meet with; it is their Iniquities is the cause of it: and when he is wrestling with this Hill, he says, *the Arrows of the Almighty are against me*.

5. There is sometimes a Hill of dark and cloudy Dispensations cast up in the Wilderness to the Believer: in the lxxiii. Psalm, see how David is involved in cloudy Dispensations.

Many other Things may be added; but let us come to the *Fourth* Thing proposed, which is to enquire into

IV. The Import of the Spouse's Posture. And, 1st, It implies Weakness and Insufficiency to grapple with the difficulties she had to wrestle with through the Wilderness. Believers find, to their experience, that all they have is not sufficient to stand out against the Difficulties they have to meet with.

2. It implies, however weak and insufficient she was, there was Almighty Strength in her Husband, on whom she was leaning. It implies that this Strength, that is in Christ, is for the Use of his Spouse and People, *being made unto us Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption.*

3. It implies Knowledge of the Lord, or Acquaintance with him; for we cannot lean on him whom we are not acquainted with; it implies Nearness unto the Lord, for we cannot lean upon one that is at a distance from us.

4. It implies not only Knowledge and Acquaintance, but Intimacy and Familiarity with him. If we lean upon any Body, we certainly must have Intimacy with them. It implies that there was fellowship betwixt Christ and her Soul; there is more sweetness in one moment of Communion with God, than all the World can afford. *It is better to be a Door-keeper in the House of God, than to dwell in the Tents of Wickedness.*

5. It implies a near approaching to God: *Lo I am with you unto the end of the World,* saith the Lord: And if we had right up-takings of him, we would see him as near to us as he was in old times unto his People, when he conversed with them. Faith sees him near, Unbelief is ready to think *he is as far off when Trouble is nigh*; but it is a mistake, for he is always near to his People.

6. It implies the Rest or Dependence of Faith upon Christ. The Spouse in her Wilderness-condition lays the burden of all concerning her upon him in Time and through Eternity; and good reason why, for she has good warrant for it. *Cast thy burdens over upon me,* says Christ. Faith rests upon Christ, as a Child upon a Parent. It implies that Faith is taking hold, or sees something in Christ to lean to. And *first*, It leans upon his Person, as he is *Immanuel*, or, *God with us*. What is the Person of Christ, but GOD manifested in the Flesh, GOD in our Nature, that they may come to him as a GOD of Love. Whenever the Soul sees it, it cries out, as the Psalmist, *Psal. xxxvi. 7. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God: therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.*

2. It leans upon the Name of the Lord. *His Name is as Ointment poured forth*: there is not one Name in Scripture but what becomes a Leaning to the Believer; his Name *Immanuel* says he is a God on our side to stand by us, &c.

3. Faith leans sometimes on the Sweetness of Christ by the Father: *God sent forth his Son*: What comfort is this, that he is a Saviour sent to us.

4. Sometimes it leans upon the Offices of Christ, of Prophet, Priest and King; there is more of Faith in these Offices, than many think. Those Offices are relative to others. As a Prophet, Faith feeds upon him for Instruction; as

a Priest, Faith feeds upon him for Benefit: the relation of a Priest to Faith, is to take benefit therefrom: as a King, Faith feeds upon him, and rests upon him for Protection. Further, Faith will rest upon the Righteousness of Christ. And how is a Believer secure with this Righteousness in a Wilderness? It is by resting and feeding and flying to his Righteousness, which is the very Breast-plate of the Believer.

5. Faith likewise leans upon the Fulness of Christ: He is full of Wisdom, Righteousness, Holiness, &c.

6. And *Lastly*, It leans upon Christ in what Relation he stands to it under the Terms of the Gospel. Here the Spouse leans upon Christ as her Husband. *First*, I will enquire into the Reasons why Believers come up from the Wilderness. *Secondly*, Why they come leaning upon Christ. If it be the practice then of Believers in this World, *to be coming up from the Wilderness*,

1. Then, it informs us of the scarcity of true Believers. For the generality of the World are not coming up, but going down the Wilderness, to the pit of destruction. The spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience, leadeth them down the Wilderness.

2. It informs us of the Reason why Believers are of another spirit, than the rest of the World. 2 Cor. iii. 17, and 18. ver. where the Apostle Paul tells us, *We have not received the Spirit of the World, but the Spirit of the Lord.* The

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Reason why many are of another Spirit, because the generality feed upon husks as the Swine do; but Believers are seeking to a better Country, and husks will not satisfy them; true Holiness of Spirit lies in disdain of things on this Earth, and *setting Affections on Things above.*

3. It discovers the Excellency of the Christian Religion: *It brings Life and Immortality to light.* I mind a saying of one who was a-dying, who had been an indifferent liver; when he was ask't what sense he had of a future State? *He had, said he, some sense that there was a future State; but what it was, he knew nothing of it.* But true Faith gives a discovery of the enjoyments and pleasures that are beyond Death. *David says, My Glory rejoiceth; thou hast shewed me the Path of Life; and at thy right hand are pleasures for ever-more.*

4. We may see the Reason why Believers express such longing Desires after another World: I say, to be out of this World; it is because they have a discovery of the enjoyment and pleasures that are beyond this World.

5. We see good Reason why Believers should exercise patience in the Wilderness. What traveller is there, but that he lays his account with difficulties in his way? Therefore Believer do not faint in the way, take a look of those about the throne; and they once met with greater difficulties than what you have met with, Rev. vii. 13. and 14. Ver. *And one*

of

of the Elders answered, saying, unto me, *What are these which are arrayed in white Robes? And whence came they?* And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, *These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb, &c.* There thou shalt be brought, and therefore do not faint in your trials or difficulties.

A Word of Trial. Is it so, that it is the Case of the Spouse to be coming up from the *Wilderness* leaning upon her Beloved? Then see and try whether you are taking your course in the *Wilderness*: Are you resting in the *Wilderness*? Therefore I ask you,

1. Has GOD loosed thy Egyptian bonds? Has he brought thee through the Red Sea? Has he discovered the death of all thine enemies, in the Red Sea of the Blood of the Lord Jesus?

2. Were you ever at the foot of *Sinai*? and did you ever see the absolute necessity of a Mediator? Has GOD discovered so much of his Love to you, as that you have fled to Him for your strength?

3. Did you ever see the Tabernacle of GOD, and the Presence of GOD in the Tabernacle? CHRIST has set up a true Tabernacle among us, in a Gospel-dispensation, have you seen the Glory of the LORD there?

4. What

16 *The Character of a Soul Espoused to Christ.*

4. What have you been living upon in the Wilderness? People in the Wilderness must have to sustain them. Well, do you know what it is to feed upon GOD? *His Flesh is Meat indeed, and his Blood is Drink indeed*, Believers say that it is the sweetest food they can have upon Earth: Well, what did you drink in the Wilderness? Believers drink of the Rock CHRIST.

5. Did you ever see the *Brasen Serpent* in the Wilderness? and have you got healing Virtue from him? What encourages you to hold on your way in the Wilderness? Is it a Land of rest? Unless the Lord had promised a better Land to the Children of *Israel*, they had not gone out of *Egypt*: If you then be engaged on another Land, is it the Promise that encourages you to hold on your way?

6. Are you really coming up from the Wilderness? Then you'll be sending *Pillars of Smoke* from the Wilderness before you; your Prayers and Desires will be towards him.—
The Lord enable you so to do.

